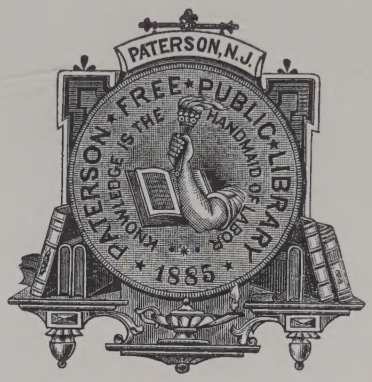
A Suabian Miracle-Rhyme



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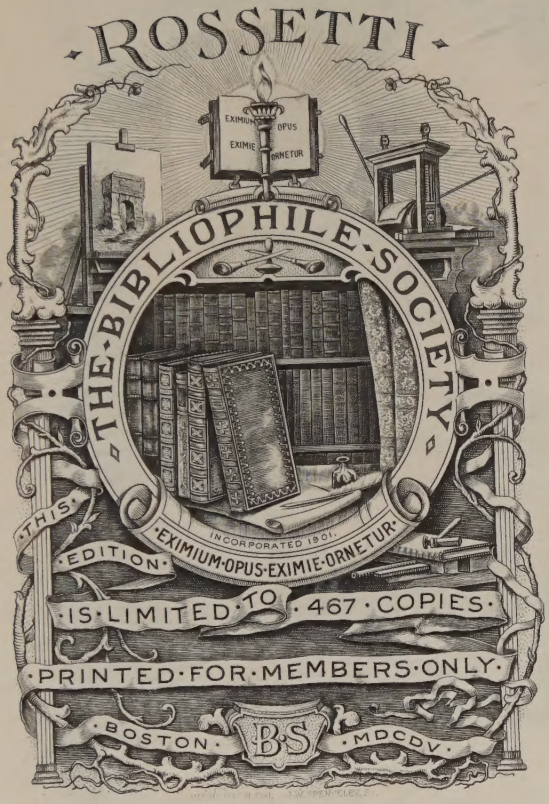
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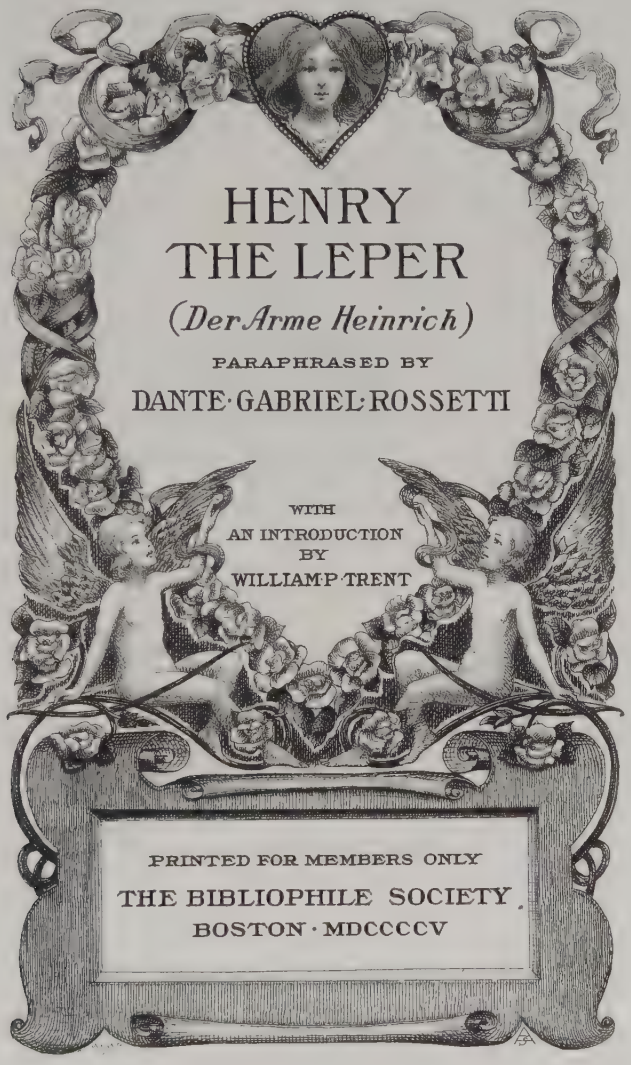

THE BIBLIOPHILE SOCIETY
EXIMIUM OPUS
EXIMIE ORNENDUR
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Yours ever affect.
D G Rossetti

Thursday

My dear Brown

I am sorry to say that Lizzie is very much worn & keeping her bed, so that I see little chance of our being able to come Sheerness way though we shall do it at all possible, but I write in case I am very sorry, but you see we must make no appointments How many copies of the criticism do you think I ought to

Kent? I am Burgiering 250. Wants Thank you.

Henry the Leper:
A Swabian Miracle-rhyme:
by Hartmann von Aue, (11-1209)

Hartmann von Aüe, the fame went,
Was a good Knight, and well acquaint
With books in every character.
Having sought this many a year,
He found at length a record, fit,
As far as he apprehendeth it,
To smooth the rugged paths uneven,
To glorify God which is in Heaven,
And gain Kind thoughts from each true heart
For himself as also for his art

Unto your ears this song sings he,—
And boys, an you hear it patiently,
That his reward be held in store;
And that whoso, when his days are o'er,
Shall read and understand this book,
For the writer unto God may look,
Praying that God may be his goal
And the place of rest to his poor soul.

That man his proper shrift shall win
Who prayeth for his brother's sin.

Part I

Once on a time, (rhymeth the rhyme,)
In Suabia-land once on a time
There was a nobleman sojourning,
Unto whose nobleness everything
Of virtue and high-hearted excellence
Worthy his line and his large pretence,
With plentiful measure was meted out:
The land rejoiced in him round about.
He was like a prince in his governing,—
In his wealth he was like a King;
But most of all by the fame far-flown
Of his great knightliness was he known
North and south upon land and sea.
By his name he was Henry of the Lea
All things whereby the Truth grew dim
Were held as hateful foes with him:
By solemn oath was he bounden fast
To shun them while his life should last.
In honour all his days went by.
Therefore his soul might look up high
To honorable authority.

A paragon of all graciousness;
A blossoming branch of youthfulness;
A looking-glass to the world around;
A stainless and priceless diamond;
Of gallant 'haviour a beautiful wreath;
A home when the tyrant menaceth;
A buckler to the breast of his friend,
And courtesy without measure or end;
Whose deeds of arms 'twere long to tell;
Of precious wisdom a limpid well;
A singer of ladies every one;
And very lordly to look upon
In feature and brawn and countenance:—
Say, failed he in anything, perchance,
The summit of all glory to gain
And the lasting honour of all men?

Alack! the soul that was up so high
Dropped down into pitiful misery,—
The lofty courage was stricken low,—
The steady triumph stumbled in woe,—
And the world-joy was hidden in the dust,
Even as all such shall be and must.

He whose life in the senses centreth
Is already in the shadow of death.
The joys, called great, of this under-state
Burn up the bosom early and late;
And their shining is altogether vain,
For it bringeth anguish and trouble and pain.
The torch that ~~burns~~ flames for men to see
And wasteth to ashes inwardly
Is verily but an imaging
Of man's own life, this piteous thing.
The whole is brittleness and mishap:
We sit and dally in Fortune's lap
Till tears break in our smiles betwixt,
And the shallow honey-draught be mix'd
With sorrow's wormwood fathomdeep:
Oh! rest not therefore, Man, nor sleep:—
In the blooming of thy flower-crown
A sword is raised to smite thee down.

Even with Earl Henry it was thus:
Though gladsome and very glorious
Was the manner of his life, yet God

Upon his spirits fulness trod;
~~The curse that fell was heavy and deep, —~~
~~And [illegible] that fell him~~
A Thunderbolt in the hour of sleep.
~~slumbertime~~.
His body, whose beauty, was so much,
Was turned ~~unto~~ into loathing and reproach;
Full of foul sores, increasing fast,
Which grew into leprosy at last.
Ages ago the Lord even so
Ordained that Job should be brought low,
To prove him if in such distress
He would hold fast his righteousness.
The great rich Earl, who otherwhile
Met but man's praise and woman's smile,
Was now no less than out-thrust quite.
The day of the world hath a dark night.

What time Lord Henry wholly knew
The storm that he was come into,
And saw folk shun him as he went
And his pains food for merriment, —
Then did he as often it is done
By those whom sorrow falleth on, —
He wrapped not round him as a robe

The patience that was found in Job.
For holy Job met semblance took
And bowed him under God's rebuke,
Which had given to him the world's curse,
And the shame, and the anguish, and the curse,
Only to snatch away his soul
From emptiness and earth's control:
Therefore his soul had triumphing
Immortal at the frontlessness thing.

In otherwise Henry bore him not;
His dutifulness his heart forgot;
His pride waxed hard and kept its place,
But the glory departed from his face,
And that which was his strength grew weak.
The hand that smote him on the cheek
Was all too heavy. It was night
Now, and his sun withdrew its light.
To the pride of his uplifted thought
Much woe the forcary knowledge brought
~~But the pleasant way his feet did wend~~
~~Has all his joys in their best day~~
~~Was all paved for and led an end.~~
~~Heart broke and died and slept away.~~
The day wherein his years had begun
Went in his mouth with a malison.

As the ill grew stronger and more strong,
There was but hope bore him along:
Even yet to hope he was full fain
That gold might help him back again
Thither whence God had cast him out.
Ah! weak to strive and little stout
'Gainst Heaven the strength that he possess'd.
North and South and east and west,
Far and wide from every side,
Medicines well-proved and tried
Came to him at the voice of his woe;
But, mused and pondered they ever so,
They could but say, for all their care,
That he must be content to bear
The burthen of the anger of God:
For him there was none other road.
Already was his heart nigh down,
When yet to him one chance was shown;
For in Salerno ~~dic~~ dwelt (folk said)
A leech who still might lend him aid,
Albeit unto his body's cure
All such had been as nought before.

Up rose fresh-hearted the sick man,
And sought the great physician,
And told him all, and prayed him hard,
With the proffer of a rich reward,
To take away his grief's foul cause.
Then said the leech without a pause:
"There is one means might healing yield,
Yet will you ever be unheal'd."

And Henry said: "Say on; define
Your thoughts; your words are as thick wine.
Some means may bring recovery? —
I will recover! Verily,
Unto your will my will shall bend,
So this mine anguish pass and end."

Then said the leech: "Give ear to me:
Thus stands it with your misery.
Albeit there be a means of health,
From no man shall you win such wealth.
Many have it, yet none will give;
You shall lack it all the days you shall live; —

Strength gets it not; valour gains it not;
Nor with gold nor with silver is it bought.
Then, since God heedeth not your plaint,
Accept God's will and be content."

"Woe's me!" did Henry's speech begin;
"Your pastime do you take herein,
To snatch the last hope from my sight?
Riches are mine, and mine is might:—
Why cast away such golden chance
As waiteth on my deliverance?
You shall grow rich in succouring me:
Tell me the means, what they may be."

Quoth the leech: "Then know them, what they are;
Yet still all hope must stand afar.
Truly if the cure for your care
Might be gotten anyway anywhere,
Did it hide in the furthest parts of earth,
Thitherwise I had not sent you forth.
But all my knowledge hath none avail;
There is but one thing would not fail:—
An innocent virgin for to find,

Chaste, and modest, and pure in mind,
Who, to save you from death, might choose
Her own young body's life to lose:
The heart's blood of the excellent maid,—
That and naught else can be your aid.
But there is none will be seen thereby
For the love of another's life to die."

'Twas then poor Henry knew indeed
That from his ill he might not be freed;
Silk that no woman he might win
Of her own will to act therein.
Thus got he but an ill return
For the journey he made unto Salerne,
And the hope he had upon that day
Was snatched from him and went away.
Homeward he hied him back: full fain
His limbs in the dust he would have lain.
Of his substance — lands and riches both —
He rid himself; even as one doth
Who the breath of the last life of his hope
Once and for ever hath rendered up.
To his friends he gave [redacted] and to the poor;

Unto God praying evermore
The spirit that was in him to save
And make his bed soft in the grave.
What still remained, aside he set
For Holy Church's benefit.
Of all that heretofore was his
Nought held he for himself, Jewis,
Save one small house, with ~~court~~ Cyrce and field.
There from the world he lived conceal'd,
There lived he, and awaited Death,
Who, being awaited, tiggereth.
Pity and ruth his troubles found
Alway through all the country round.
Who heard him named had sorrow deep
And for his piteous sake would weep.

Part II

The little farm, with herd and field,
Now, as it had been erst, was till'd
By a poor man of simple make
Whose heart right seldom had the ache.
A happy soul, and well content
With every chance that fortune sent;
Being equal in fortune's pitch
Even unto him that is rich, —
For that his master's kindly will
Set limit to his labour still,
And without cumbrance and in peace
He lived upon the field's increase.
With him poor Henry trouble-proof'd
Dwelt, and to dwell with him was rest.
In grateful wise, neglecting nought,
Still was the peasant's service wrought:
Cheerily both in heart and look
The bramble and the toil he took,
Which, new as each day dawned anew,
For Henry he must bear and do.

With favour which to blessings ran

God looked upon the worthy man:
He gave him strength to aid his life,
A sturdy heart, an honest wife,
And children such as bring to be
That a man's breast is brimmed with glee.
Among them was a little maid,
Red-cheeked, in yellow locks arrayed;
Whose tenth year was just lapsing her;
With eyes most innocently clear,
Sweet smiles that ~~charm~~ soothe, sweet tones that lull;
Of gracious semblance wonderful.

For her sick lord the dear good child
Was full of tender thoughts and mild.
Rarely from sitting at his feet
She rose; because his speech was sweet
To serve him she was proud and glad.
Great fear her little playmates had
At the sight of the loathly wight;
But she, as often as she might,
Went to him and with him would stay;
And her heart unto him always
Clave as a child's heart cleaves: his pain

And grief that ever must remain,
With childish grace she soothed the while;
And sat her at his feet with a smile.

And Henry loved the little one
Who had such thought his woes upon,
And he would buy her baubles bright
Such as to children give delight:
Nought else to peace his heart could life
Like her innocent gladness at the gift.
A ribband sometimes, broad and fair,
To twine with the tresses of her hair,
Or a looking-glass, or a little ring,
Or a girdle-clasp,—at anything.
She was so thankful, was so pleased,
That in some sort his pain was eased,
And he would wear very jestingly,
His own good little wife was she.
Seldom she left him long alone,
Winning him from his inward moan
With love and childish trustfulness;
Her joyous seeming never grew less;
She was a balm unto his breast,—

Unto his eyes she was shade and rest.

Already were three years outwrung,
And still his torment o'er him hung,
And still in death ceased not his life.

It chanced the peasant and his wife,
And his two little daughters, sate
Together when the day was late.
Their talk was all upon their lord,
And how the help they could afford
Was joy to them, and of the woe
They suffered for his sake, — yet how
His death, they feared, might bring them worse.
They thought that in the universe
No lord could be so good as he,
And if but once they lived to see
Another inherit — of their friend,
That all their welfare needs must end.

Then to his lord the peasant spake:
"Question, dear master, I would make,
So you permit me, of the cause

Wherefore thus long you have made pause
From seeking help from such as were
Worship by lore of medicine
And famers are both near and far.
One such might yet break down the bar
That shuts you from your health's estate.
Wherefore, dear master, should you wait.

Then sighs from the soul of the sick man
Prefed outward, and his tears began;
They were so sore, that when he spake
It seemed as though his heart would break.

"From God this woful curse", he said,
Woefully have I merited,
Whose mind but to world-vanity
Looked, and but thought how best to be
Wonderous in the thinking of men:
Worship I laboured to attain
By wealth, which God in his great views
Had given me for another use: —
God's self I had well-nigh forgot,
The moulder of my human lot,

Whose gifts, ill taken though well bestow'd,
Hindered me from the Heaven-road;
Till I at length, lost here as there,
Am chosen unto shame & despair.
His wrath's insufferable weight
Made me to know Him, — but too late.
From bad to worse, from worse to worst,
At length I am cast forth and curs'd:
The whole world from my side doth flee;
The wretchedest insulteth me;
Looking on me, each ruffian
Accounts himself the better man,
And turns his visage from the sight,
As though I brought him bane and blight.
Therefore may God reward thee, Thou
Who dost bear with me even now,
Not scorning him whose sore distress
No more may guerdon faithfulness.
And yet, however kind and true
The deeds thy goodness bids thee do, —
Still, spite of all, it must at heart
Rejoice thee when my breath shall part.
How am I ~~forlorn~~ outcast and forlorn!! —

That I, who as thy Lord was born,
Must now beseech thee of thy grace
To succour me in mine evil case.
With a great blessing verily
Thou shalt be blest of God through me,
Because to me, whom God thus tries,
Pity thou grantest, Christianwise.
The thing thou askest thou shalt have:—
All the physicians long ago,
Who might bring help in any kind,
I sought;—but, woe is me! to find
That all the help in all the earth
Avails not and is nothing worth.
One means there is indeed; and yet
That means nor gold nor prayers may get:—
A leech who is full of lore hath said
How it needeth that a virtuous maid
For my sake with her life should part,
And feel the steel cut to her heart:
Only in the blood of such an one
My curse may cease beneath the Sun.
But such an one what hope can show,
Who her own life would thus forego

To save my life? – Then let despair
Bow down within my soul to bear
The wrath God's justice doth up-pile.
When will Death come? Woe, woe the while!"

Of these, poor Henry's words, each word
The little maiden likewise heard
Who at his feet would always sit;
And forgot it not, but remembered it.
In the kid shrine, her heart's recess,
She held his words in silentness.
As the mind of an angel was her mind,
Grave and holy and Christ-inclin'd.

When in their chamber, day being past,
Her parents, after toil, slept fast, –
Then always with the selfsame stir
The sighs of her grief troubled her.
At the foot of her parents' bed
Lying, so many tears she shed
(Bitter and many) as to make
That they woke up and kept awake.

Her secret grieving once perceived,
They made much marvel why she grieved,
And questioned her of the evil chance
To which she gave sorrowful utterance
In her sobbings and in her undercries:
But nothing answered she anywise,
Until her father bade her tell
Openly and truly and well
Why night by night within her bed
So many bitter tears she shed.
"Alack!" quoth she, "what should it be
But our kind master's misery, —
With thoughts how soon we now must miss
Both him and all our happiness?
Our solace shall be ours no more:
There is no lord alive, be sure,
Who, like unto him and of his worth,
Shall bless our days with peace thenceforth."

They answering said: "Right words and rare
Thou speakest; but it boots not an hair
That we should make outcry and lament.
Brood then no longer thereanent.

Unto us it is pain as unto thee,
Perchance even more; yet what can we
That may avail for succouring?
Truly the Lord hath done this thing."

Thus silenced they her speaking; but
Her souls complaint they silenced not.
Grief lay with her from hour to hour
Through the long night; nor dawn had power
To rid her of it; all beside
That near and about her might betide
Seemed nought. And when sleep covered men,
Again and again and yet again,
Wakeful and faithful, she would crouch
Wearily on her little couch,
Hoping in trouble without sign:
And from her eyes the scalding brine
Flowed through sick grief that wept apart;
As steadfastly within her heart
She pondered on her hearts' sore ache
And on those words Earl Henry spake.
Long with herself communing so,
Her tears were softened in their flow;

Because at length her will was fix'd
To stand his fate and him betwixt.

Where now should such a child be sought,
Thinking even as this one thought,
Who, rather than her lord should die,
Chose her own death and held thereby?

But once her purpose settled fast,
All woe went forth from her and hasted;
Her heart sat lightly in her breast,
And one thing only gave unrest.
Her lord's own hand, she feared, might stay
Her footsteps from the terrible way, —
She feared her parents strength might lack,
And, through much loving, hold her back.

By reason of such fears, she fell
Into new grief unspeakable,
And that night, as the past nights, went,
Waking her father where he slept.
"Thou foolish child," (thus did he say,)
"Why wilt thou weep thine eyes away

For what no help thou hast can mend?
Is not this moan thou makst to end?
We would sleep; let us sleep in peace."
Thus chidingly he bade her cease,
Because his thought conceived in nought
The thing she had laid up in her thought.

Answered him the excellent maid:
"Truly my own dear lord hath said
That by one means he may be heal'd.
So ye but your consenting yield,
It is my blood that he shall have.
I, (being virgin-pure,) to save
His days, do choose the edge o' the knife,
And my death rather than my life."

The young girl's parents lay and heard,
And had sore grief of her spoken word;
And thus her father said: "How now?
What silly wish, child, wishest thou?
Thou durst not do it in very truth.
What knows a child of these things, forsooth?
Ugly Death thou hast never seen:

Were he once to near thee, I ween, —
Didst thou view the pit of the sepulchre, —
Thy face would change and thy flesh fear,
And thy soul within thee would shake,
And thy weak hands would toil to break
The grasp of the monster fond and grim
Drawing thee from thyself to him.
Leave thy words and thy weeping too;
What cannot be done, seek not to do."

"Nay, father mine," replied the child,
"Though my words may be counted wild,
Well I know that the body's death
Is a torture and torureth.
Yet truly this is truth no less:
He who is plagued with sharp distress,
Who hates his life, having but woe, —
To him the end cometh, even so,
When, for all the curses that he hath paid
He escapes not the curse of death at last.
What boots it him a long-drawn life
To have traversed in trouble and in strife,
If nothing after all he can win,

Except, being old, to enter in
At the self-same door which years ago
He might more firmly have passed through?
But scantly may the soul be good,—
So rough is world-driving and so rude;
And, good once ended, hope once born,
Best it were I had not been born.
Therefore my lips give praise to God,
Who this great blessing hath bestow'd
On me,—by loss of body and limb
To have the life that lives with Him.
'Twere ill done, did He make me loth
From what unto me and unto both
Bringeth joy and prosperity;
Gaining the crown of Christ for me;
And you, from every troublous thing
That threateneth you, delivering.
The generous master ye shall keep
Who leaves you undisturbed to reap
The fruits our little field doth grow,—
Earned, father, in the sweat of thy brow.
With you, while he liveth, it shall stay;
He is good; he will not drive you away.

But if we now should let him die,
Our reuing hastneth thereby:
The thought whereof doth make me give
My own young life that he may live.
To such a choice, which profits all,
Meseems your chiding should be small."

Then the mother broke forth at last,
Finding her daughter's purpose fast:—
"Think, my own child,—daughter mine, think
Of the bitter cup that I had to drink,
Of the pain that I suffered once for thee;
And, thinking, turn thyself unto me.
Is this the guerdon thou dost give
Even to the womb that bade thee live?
Her in pain must I lose again
Whom I bore and brought forth in pain?
Would'st leave thy parents for thy lord?
This were hatred of God and his word!
Clean from thy mind is the word gone
Which God pronounced? Ponder thereon:
"Listen" (it is written) "to their command,
That thy days may be long in the land."

Lo! how corrupt must be thine heart, —
It hath striven the will of God to thwart.
And sayest thou, — if thou losest thus
Thy life, good hap shall come to us?
Oh no! in us thou wilt give birth
To weariness and to scorn of earth.
In the whole world thou art alone
That which our joy is set upon
Yea, little daughter, always dear,
'Tis thou shouldst make our gladness here.
Thou shouldst be a lamp to our life,
Our wine in the troublesome hard strife,
And a staff our failing steps to save:
In place whereof, thine own black grave
With thine own hand thou diggest, and sad
Grows the hope and the comfort that we had,
And I must weep at thy tomb all day
Till in plague and torment I pass away
Yet oh! whatever our ills may be,
So much and more shall God do to thee."

Then the pious maid answered and said: —
"O mother that in my soul art laid, —

How should I not at all times here
See the path of my duty clear,
When at all times my thankful mind
Meeteth thy love, tender and kind,
That kindly and tenderly ministers?
Of a verity I am young in years;
Yet this I know: What is mine, to wit,
Is mine but since thou gavest it.
And if the people grant me praise
And look with favour in my face,
Yet my heart's tale is continual
That only thee must I thank for all
Which it pleaseth them to perceive in me;
And that never a thing should be brought to be
By myself or myself, save such
As thou wouldst permit without reproach.
Mother, it was thou that didst give
These limbs and the life wherewith I live,
And is it thou wouldst grudge my soul
Its white robe and its aureole?
The knowledge of evil in my breast
Hath not yet been, nor sin's unrest;
Therefore, the road being overhard,

I know I shall have portion with God.
Say not that this is foolishness;
No hand but God's hand is in this:
Him must Thou thank, whose grace doth cleanse
My heart from earthly desire, till hence
It longs with a mighty will to go
Ere sin be known that yet to know.
Will it needs that the joys of earth
(Deemed oftentimes of a priceless worth)
By man should be counted excellent:
How otherwise might he rest content
With anything but Christ's perfecting?
Oh! to such ends let me not cling!
God knows how vain seem to my sight
The bliss of this world and the delight;
For the delight turneth amiss,
And soul's tribulation hath the bliss.
What is their life? — a gasp for breath.
And their guerdon? — but the burthen of death.
~~Nothing is sure, save this,~~ One thing alone is sure; ~~—~~ should peace
Come to-day, with tomorrow it shall cease;
~~Still~~ Still this last will, at last,
Shall find us out, and our days be past.

Nor birth nor wealth succoureth them,
Nor strength, nor the courage of strong men,
Nor honour, nor fealty, nor truth.
Out and alack! Our life, our youth,
Are but dust only and empty smoke:
We are laden branches that the winds rock.
Woe to the fool who layeth hold
On earth's ~~vanities which are~~ vain shadows manifold!
The marsh-fire gleam as it hath shone
Still shines, luring his footsteps on;
But he is dead ere he reach the goal,
And with his flesh dieth his soul.
Therefore, dear mother, be at rest,
And ~~labour~~ not to make manifest
That for my sake thou ~~wouldst~~ hold'st me dear.
~~But in thy silence it shall be clear~~ But let one silence make it clear
That my father's will ~~cometh~~ is joined with thine
Alas! though I kept this life of mine,
'Tis verily but a little while
That ye may smile or that I may smile.
Two years perchance, perchance even three,
In happiness I shall keep with ye:
Then must our Lord be surely dead,

And sorrow and sighing find us instead;
And your want shall your will withhold
From giving me any dowry-gold,
And no man will take me for his wife;
And my life shall be trouble-rife,
And very hateful, and worse than death.
Or though this thing that threateneth
Were 'scaped, and ere our good Lord died
Some bridegroom chose me for his bride,—
Though then, ye think, all is made smooth,
Yet the bad is but made worse, forsooth;
For woe with love, woe should not cease,
And not to love were the end of peace.
Thus through ill and grief I struggle still,
What to attain? Even grief and ill.
In this strait, One would set me free,
My soul and my body asking of me,
That I may be with him where he is.
Hold me not; I would make myself His.
He only is the true husbandman;
The labour and toil which He began;
Ever His plough goeth aright;
His barns fill; for His fields there is no blight,

In His lands life dies not anywhere;
Never a child sorroweth there;
There heat is not, neither is cold;
There the lapse of years maketh not old;
But peace hath its dwelling there for aye,
And abideth, and shall not pass away.
Thither, yea, thither let me go,
And be rid of this shadow-place below,—
This place laid waste like a waste plain,
Where nothing is but torment and pain;
Where a day's blight falleth upon
The work of a year, and it is gone;
Where ruinous thunder lifts its voice,
And where the harvest may not rejoice.
You love me? Oh, let your love be seen;
And labour no more to circumvene
My hearts' desire for the happy place.
To the Lord let me lift my face,—
Even unto Jesus Christ my Friend,
Whose gracious mercies have no end,
In whose name Love is the world's dear Lord,
And by whom not the vilest is abhorr'd.
Alike with him is man's estate,—

As the rich the poor, the small as the great:
Were I a queen, be sure that He
With more joy could not welcome me.
Yet from your hearts do I turn my heart?
Nay, from your love I will not part,
But rejoice to be subject unto you.
Then count not my thought to be wantonness
Because I deem, if I do this thing,
It is your weal I am furthering.
Whoso (men say) another's pelf
Heaping, pulls want upon himself, —
Whoso his neighbour's fame would crown
By bringing ruin upon his own, —
His friendship is surely overmuch.
But this my purpose is none such.
For though ye too shall gain relief,
It is myself I would serve in chief.
O mother dear, weep not nor mourn:
My duty is this; let it be borne.
Take heart, — thou hast other children left;
In theirs thy life shall ~~seem~~ be less bereft; —
They shall comfort thee for the loss of me:
Then my own gain let me bring to be,

And my Lords; for to him upon the earth
This only can be of any worth.
Nor think that thou shalt look on my grave;
That pain at least thou canst never have.
Very far away is the land
Where that must be done which I have plann'd.
God guerdoneth; in God is my faith;
He shall loosen me from the bonds of Death."

Part III

All troubling had the parents heard
Death by their daughter thus preferr'd
With a language so very marvellous,
(Surely no child reasoneth thus,)
Whose words between her lips made stir
As though the Spirit were poured on her
Which giveth knowledge of tongues unknown.
So strange was every word and tone,
They knew not how they might answer it,
Except by striving to submit
To Him who had made the child's heart rife
With the love of death and the scorn of life.
Therefore they said silently still:
"All-perfect One, it is Thy will."
With ~~grief~~ fear and doubts most bitter bran
They were a-cold; so the poor man
And the poor woman sat always
In their bed, without yea or nay.
Ever alack! They had no speech
The new dawn of their thought to reach.
With a wild sorrow unrepress'd
The mother caught the child to her breast:

But the father after long interval
Said, though his soul smote him withal:
"Daughter, if God is in thine heart,
Heed not our grieving, but depart."

Then the sweet maid smiled quietly;
And soon i' the morning hastened she
To the room where the sick man slept
Up to his bed she softly crept'd,
Saying, "Do you sleep, my dear lord?"

"No, little wife," was his first word,
But why art thou so early to-day?"

Grief made that I could not keep away
The great grief that I have for you."

"God be with thee, faithful and true!
Often to ease my suffering
Thou hast done many a gracious thing.
But it lasteth; it shall be always so."

Then said the girl: "On my troth, no!

Take courage and comfort; – it will burn.
The fire that in your flesh doth burn,
One means, you know, would quench at once.
My mind climbs to conclusions.
Not a day will I make delay,
Now I am aware of the one way
Dear Lord, I have heard yourself expound,
How, if only a maiden could be found
To lose her life for you willingly,
From all your pains you might yet be free.
God He knoweth, I will do this:
My worth is not as yours, I wis".

Wondering and sore astonied,
The poor sick man looked at the maid
Whose face smiled down unto his face,
While the tears gave each other chase
Over his cheeks from his weary eyes,
Till he made answer in this wise: –
"Trust me, this Death is not, my child,
So tender a trouble and so mild
As thou, in thy reckoning, reckonest.
Thou didst keep madness from my breast,

And help me when other help was gone:
I thank thee for all that thou hast done.
(May God unto thee be merciful
For thy tenderness on the day of Dule!)
I know thy mind, childlike and chaste,
And the innocent spirit that thou hast;
But nothing more will I ask of thee
Than thou without wrong mayst do for me.
Long ago have I given up
The strife for deliverance and the hope;
So that now in thy faithfulness
I pleasure me with a soul at peace,
Wishing not thy sweet life withdrawn
Since my own life I have foregone
Too suddenly, little wife, beside,
Like a child's, doth thine heart decide
On this which hath entered into it, —
Unsure if thou shalt have benefit.
In little space more were thy case
If once with Death thou wert face to face;
And heavy and dark would the thing seem
Which thou hast desired in thy dream.
Therefore, good child, go in again:

Soon, I know, thou wilt count as vain
This thing to which thy mind is wrought,
When once thou hast pondered in thy thought
How hard a thing it is to remove
From the world and from the home of one's love.
And think too what a grievous smart
Hereby must come to thy parents' heart,
And how bitter it them ~~must~~ would be the stroke.
Shall I bring this thing on the honest folk
By whose pity my woes have been beguiled?
To thy parents' counselling, my child,
For evermore look that thou incline:
So sorrow of heart shall not be thine."

When thus he had answered tenderly,
Forth came the parents, who hard by
Had harkened to the speech that he spoke.

Albeit his heart was nigh to break
With the load under which it bowed,
The father spake these words aloud:
"God knows," said he, "we do willingly,
Dear master, aught that may vantage thee

Who hast been so good to us and so kind.
If God have in very truth designed
That this young child should for thee atone,—
Then, being God's will, let it be done.
Yea, through His power she hath been brought
To count the years of her youth for nought;
And by no childish whim is she led
To her grave, as thou hast imagined.
To-day, alack! is the third day
That with prayers we might not put away
She hath sorely entreated us that we
Would grant her the grace to die for thee
By her words exceeding wonderful,
Our sharp resistance hath waxed dull,
Till now we may no longer dare
To pause from the granting of her prayer."

When the sick man thus found that each
Spoke with good faith the selfsame speech,
And that in earnest the young maid
Proffered her life for his body's aid,—
There rose, the little room within,
Of sobbing and sorrow a great din,

And a strange dispute, that side and this,
In manner as there seldom is.
The Earl, at length coming unto
The means of health, raised much ado,
Loudly lamenting that his cure
From sickness should be thus made sure.
The parents grieved with a bitter woe
That their dear child should leave them so,
While yet they prayed of him constantly
To grant her prayer that she should die.
And she meanwhile, whose life-long years
It was to cost, shed sorrowful tears,
For dread lest he whom she would save
Should deny to her the boon of the grave.

Thus they who, in pure faith's control
And in the strength of a godly soul,
Vied one with the other, sat there now,
Their eyes all wet with the bitter flow,
Each urging of what he had to say,
None yielding at all nor giving way.
The sick man sat in thought a space,
Between his hands bowing his face,

While the others, with supplicating tone,
Softly besought him one by one.
Then his head at last he lifted up,
And let his tears fall without stop,
And said finally: "So let it be.
Shall I, who am one, stand against three?
Now I know and surely that God's word,
Which speaks in silence, ye have heard;
And that this thing must be very fit,
And even as God hath appointed it:
He, seeing my heart, doth read thereon
That I yield but to Him alone, —
Not to the wish that for my sake
Her grave this gracious child should make."

Then the maid sprang to him full fain,
As though she had gotten a great gain;
And both his feet clasped and would kiss, —
Not for sorrow sobbing now, but for bliss:
The while her sorrowing parents went
Forth from that room to make lament
And weep apart for the heavy load
Which yet they knew was the will of God

Then a kirtle was given unto the maid,
Broidered all with the silken braid,
Such as never before she had put on;
With sables the border was bedone,
And with jewels bound about and around.
On her so fair they were fairer found
Than song of mine can make discourse.
And they mounted her on a goodly horse.
That horse was to carry her very far,—
Even to the place where the dead are.

In the taking of these gifts, she smil'd.
Not any longer a silly child
She seemed, but a worshipful damozel,
Well-begotten and nurtured well.
And her face had a quiet earnestness;
And while she made ready, none the less
Did she comfort the trouble-stricken pair,
Who in awestruck wise looked on her there
As a saintly being superior
And no daughter unto them any more.

Yet when the bitter moment came
Wherein their child must depart from them,
In both it was hard to separate.
The mother's grief was heavy and great,
Seeing that child lost to her, whom,
Years since, she had carried in her womb.
And the father was sorely shaken too,
Now nought remained but to bid adieu
To that young life, full of the Spring,
Which must witter before the blossoming.

What made the twain more strong at length
Was the young girl's wonderful strength,
Whose calm look and whose gentle word
Blunted the sharp point of the sword.
With her mouth she was eloquent,
As if to her ear an angel bent,
Whispering her that she might say
The word which wipes all tears away.
Thus, with her parents' benison
Upon her head, forth is she gone:—
She is gone forth like to a bride,
Lifted and inwardly glorified;

She seemed not as one that journeyeth
To the door of the house of death.

So they rode without stop or turn
By the paths that take unto Salerne.
Lo! he is riding to new life
Whose countenance is laden and rife
With sorrow and care and great dismay.
But for her who rides the channel-way,—
Oh! up in her eyes sits the bright look
Which tells of a joy without rebuke.
With friendly speech, with cheerful jest,
She toils to give his sorrow rest,
To lighten the heavy ~~and~~ time for him
And ~~soften~~ shorten the road that was long & grim.

Thus on their way they still did wend
Till they were come to their journey's end.
Then prayed She of him that they might reach
That day the dwelling of the wise leech
Who had shown how his ill might be allayed.

And it was done even as she said.

His arm in hers, went the sick man
Unto the great physician;
And brought again to his mind the thing
Whereof they had erst made questioning.
"This maid" (he said) "holds purpose now
To work my cure, as they speech did show."

But the leech held silence, as one doth
Whose heart to believe is well-nigh loth
Even though his eyes witness a thing.
At length he said: "By whose counselling
Comes this, my child? Hast thou thought well
On that whereof thus lord doth tell,
Or art thou led perforce thereto?"

"Nay," quoth the maid, "that which I do
I do willingly; none persuadeth me;
It is, because I choose it should be."

He took her hand, silently all,
And led her through a door in the wall
Into another room that was there,
Wherein he was quite alone with her.

Then thus: "Thou poor ill-guided child,
What is it that maketh thee so wild,
Thy short life and thy little breath
Suddenly to yield up to death?
An' thou art constraind, e'en say 'tis so,
And I swear to thee thou art free to go.
Remember this; – how that thy blood
Unto the Earl can bring no good
If thou sheddest it with an inward strife.
Vain it were to bleed out thy life,
If still, when the whole hath come to pass,
Thy lord should be even as he was.
Bethink thee, – and consider thereof, –
How the pains thou temptest are hard & rough.
First, with thy limbs naked and bare
Before mine eyes thou must appear, –
So needs ~~shall~~ thy maiden shame be sore:
Yet still must the woe be more and more,
What time thou art bound by heel & arm,
And with sharp hurt and with grievous harm
I cut from out thy breast the part
That is most alive – even thine heart.
With Thine eyes thou shalt surely see

The knife ere it enter into thee, —
Thou shalt feel worse than death's worst sting
Ere the heart be drawn forth quivering.
How deemest thou? Canst thou suffer this?
Alack, poor wretch! there is dreadfulness
Even in the thought. If only once
Thou do blench or shrink when the blood runs,
If thou do repent but by an hair, —
It is bootless all, — in vain the care,
In vain the scathe, in vain the death.
Now what is the word thy free choice saith?"

She looked at him as at a friend,
And answered: "Sir, unto that end, —
To wit, my choice, — I had pondered hard
Long ere I was borne hitherward.
I thank you, Sir, that of your heart's ruth
You have warned me thus; and of a truth,
By all the words that you have said
I well might feel dispirited, —
The more that even yourself, meseems,
Are frighted by these idle dreams
From the work you chiefed perforce for the Earl.

Oh! it might hardly grace a girl,
Such cowardly reasoning to use!
Pardon me, Sir; I cannot choose
But laugh, that you with your masterlyk
Should have a courage lip firm and deep
Than a pitiful maiden without core
Whose life even now ends and is o'er.
The part that is yours dare but to do, —
As for me, I have trust to undergo.
Methinks the duke and the dreadhead
You tell me of, must be sharp indeed,
Sith the mere thought is so troublesome.
Believe me, I never should have come,
Had I not known of myself alone
What the thing was to be undergone, —
Were I not sure that, sharked no whit,
This soul of mine could go through with it.
Yea, verily; by your sorrowing,
My poor heart's courage you can bring
Just to such sorrowful circumstance
As though I were going to the dance.
Worshipped Sir, there nothing is
That can last alway without cease, —

Nought that one day's vermilion doom
Can save the feeble body from.
Thus then, you see, it is cheerfully
That I do all this; and that while he
(My lord), you willing, shall not die,—
The endless life shall be mine thereby.
Resolve you; and so it shall be said
That the fame you have is well merited.
This brings me joy that I undertake,
Even for my dear kind master's sake,
And for what we two shall gain also,—
I, there above,—and you, here below.
Sir, in as much as the work is hard,
So much the more is our great reward."

Then the leech said nothing, but was dumb;
And marvelling much, he sought the room
Where the sick man sat in expectancy.
"New courage may be yours," quoth he,
For your sake she casts her life behind,
Not from empty fantasy of the mind;
And the parting of her body and soul
Shall cleanse your limbs and make you whole."

But Henry was full of troublous thought;
Peradventure he hearkened not,
For he answered not, that which was said.
So the leech turned, and went out again.

Again to the maid did he repair
And straightway locked the doors with care,
That Henry might not see or know
What she for his sake must undergo.
And the leech said, "Take thy raiment off."
Then was her heart joyous enough,
And she obeyed, and in little space
Stood up before the old man's face
As naked as God had fashioned her:
Only her innocence clothed her:
She feared not and was not ashamed,
In the sight of God standing unblamed,
To whom her dear life without price
She offered up for a sacrifice

When thus she was beheld of the leech,
His soul spake with an inward speech,
Saying that beauty so excellent

Had scarce been known since the world went.
And he conceived for the poor Thing
Such an unspeakable pitying,
And such a fear on his purpose lit,
That he scarce dared to accomplish it.
Slowly he gave her his command
To lie down on a table hard at hand
To the which he bound her with strong cords.
Then he reached his hand forth afterwards
And took a broad long knife, and tried
The edge of the same on either side.
It was sharp, yet not as it should be.
(He looked to its sharpness heedfully, —
Having sore grief for the piteous death,
And desiring to shorten her death.)
Therefore it was he took a stone,
And ground the knife finely thereon.

Earl Henry heard in bitterest woe
The blade, a-whetting, come and go.
Forward he sprang; a sudden start
Of grief for the maid struck to his heart.
He thought what a peerless soul she bore,

And made a great haste unto the door,
And would have gone in, but it was shut.
Then his eyes burned, as he stood without,
In scalding tears; transfigured
He felt himself; and in the stead
Of his feebleness there was mightiness.
"Shall she," he thought, "who my life doth bless,—
The gracious, righteous, virtuous maid,—
To this end be thrust down to the shade?
Wilt thou, then fool, force the Most High,
That thy desire may come thereby?
Deemst thou that any, for good or ill,
Can live but a day against His will?
And if by His will then yet shalt live,
What more of help can her dying give?
Sith all then is as God ordaineth,
Rest evermore in the hand of faith.
As in past time, anger not now
The All-powerful; seeing that thou
Canst anger Him only. 'Tis the ways
Of penitence lead unto grace."

He was determined immediately,

And smote on the door powerfully,
And cried to the leech: "Open to me!"

But the leech answered: "It may not be:
I have something of weight that I must do."

Then Henry urged back upon him: "No!
Come quickly, and open, and give o'er."

Quoth the other: "Say your say through the door."

"Not so, not so; let me enter in:
It is my soul's rest I would win."

Then the door drew back, widely and well;
And Henry looked on the damozel,
Where she lay bound, body and limb,
Waiting Death's stroke, to conquer him.

"Hear me," said he, "worshipful Sir;
It is horrible thus to look on her:
Rather the burthen of God's might
I choose to suffer, than this sight.
What I have said, that will I give;
But let thou the brave maiden live."

Part IV

When the maiden learned assuredly
That, by that death she was not to die,
And when she was loosed from the strong bands,
A sore moan made she. With her hands
She rent her hair; and such were her tears
That it seemed a great wrong had been hers.

"Woe worth the weary time!" she cried;
"There is no pity on any side.
Woe is me! It fades from my view —
The recompense I was chosen to, —
The magnificent heaven-crown
~~[illegible]~~ I hoped with such a hope to put on.
Now it is I am truly dead, —
Now it is I am truly ruined.
O shame and sorrowing on me!
And shame and sorrowing on thee,
Who the guerdon from my spirit hast riven
And by whose hands I am snatched from Heaven!
O! he chooseth his own calamity,
That so my crown may be reft from me!"

Then with sharp prayer she prayed them there
That still the death might be given her
For the which she had journeyed many a mile.
But being assured in a brief while
That the thing she sought would be denied,
She gazed with a piteous mien, and cried,
Rebuking her heart-beloved lord: —
"Is all then lost that my soul implor'd?
How faint art thou, how little brave,
To bend me with this load that I have!
How have I been cheated with lies
And cozened with fair-seeming falsities!
They told me thou wast honest and good,
And valiant, and full of noble blood, —
The which, so help me God! was false.
Thou art one the world unjustly miscalls.
Thou art but a weak timorous man
Whose soul affrighted fails to scan
The strength of a woman's outfeyance.
Have I injured thee anyway, perchance?
Say, how didst thou hear, sitting without?
And yet methinks the wall was stout
Betwixt us. Nay, but then must know

That it is to be — that it will be so.
Take heed, — there is no second one
Who yet for thy life will lose her own.
O turn to me and be pitiful,
And grudge not death to my poor soul."

But though her suing was hard and hot,
His firmness never failed him a jot;
So that at length, against her will,
She needs must end her cries and be still, —
Yielding her to the loathed decree
That made her life a necessity.
Lord Henry to one will was wrought,
Fast settled in his steadfast thought:
He clothed her again with his own hand,
And again set forth to his native land,
Having given large reward to the leech.
He knew the shame and the evil speech
And the insult he must bear; yet bowed
Meekly thereto; knowing that God
Had willed, in his regard, each thing
That wrought for him weal or suffering.

Thus by the damsels' help indeed
From a foul sickness he was freed, —
Not from his body's sore and smart,
But from hardness & stubbornness of heart.
Then first was all that pride of his
Quite overthrown; a better bliss
Came to his soul and dwelt with him
Than the bliss he had in the first time; —
To wit, a blithe hearts priceless gain
That looks to God through the tears of pain

But as they rode, the righteous maid
Mourned and might not be comforted.
Her soul was aghast, her heart was weak
Her wits were all confused and displaced.
Her seemed that the leaning on God's might
Was turned for her to shame and despite:
So her pure heart ceased not to pray
That the woe she had might be taken away.

Thus came the girl and the sick wight
To an hostel at the fall of the night.
Each in a little chamber alone,

They watched till many hours were gone.
The nobleman gave thanks to God
Who had turned him from the profitless road,
And cleansed him, by care and suffering,
From his loftiness and vain-glorying.
The damsel went down on her knees
And spake to God such words as these: —
Why thus He had put aside, and left
Out of His grace, her and her gift; —
Seeing how she had nothing more
To give but her one life bare and poor.
She prayed: "Am I not good enough,
Thou Holy One, to partake thereof?
Then, O my God! cleanse Thou mine heart
Let me not thus cease and depart.
Give me a sign, Father of mine,
That the absolving grace Divine
By seeking may at length be found
While yet this earth shall hold me round."

And God, who lifts souls from the dust
Nor turns from the spirit that hath trust, —
The Same looked down with looks meek

On the troublesome sorrow of them both,
Both whose hearts and whose life-long days
He had won to Him for glory and praise,—
Who had passed through the fire and come forth
And proved themselves salvation-worth.
The Father — He who comforteth
His patient children that have faith —
At length released these steadfast ones
From their manifold tribulations.
In wondrous wise the Earl was stripp'd
Of all his sickness while he slept;
And when, as the sunrise smote his een,
He found him once more whole and clean,
He rose from his couch and sought the maid.

On the sight for which she long had prayed,
She gazed and gazed some speechless space;
And then knelt down with lifted face,
And said: "The Lord God hath done this:
His was the deed,—the praise be His.
With solemn thinking let me take
The life which He hath given me back."

Part V

The Earl returned in joyful case
Unto his fathers' dwelling-place.
Every day brought back to him
A part of his joy which had waxed dim;
And he grew new, of face and mien,
More comely than ever he had been.
And unto all who in former years
Had been his friends and his comforters,
He told how God's Allmercifulness
Had delivered him out of his distress.
And they rejoiced, giving the praise
To God and His unsearchable ways.

Then
~~Hen~~ thitherward full many a rood
Men came, a gladsome multitude;
They came in haste, they rode and they ran
To welcome the gallant gentleman;
Their own eyes they could scarce believe,
Beholding him in health and alive.
A strange sight it may well be said,
When one revives that was counted dead.

The worthy peasant, who so long
Had tended him when the curse was strong,
In the good time stayed not away,
Nor his wife could be brought to stay.
'Twas then that after long suspense
Their labour got its recompense.
They who had hoped no other thing
Than the sight of their lord, on entering
Saw the Sweet damsel by his side,
In perfect measure satisfied,
Who caught them round with either arm
And clave to them closely and warm.
Longtime they kissed her in good sooth, –
They kissed her on her cheeks and mouth.
Within their breasts their hearts were light,
And eyes which first laughed & were bright
Soon overbrimmed with many tears,
The tokens of the joy that was theirs.

Then the good honest Suabians,
Who erst had shared the inheritance
Of the sick Lord, gave back the land,
Unasked, which they had taken at his hand

Him did they wholly reinstate
In every title and estate
That heretofore he had possess'd.
But ever he pondered in his breast
Upon those wondrous things which once
God wrought on his flesh and in his bones.

Nor did he in anywise forget
The friendly pair whose help, ere yet
His horrors of pain were overpast,
Had stood him in such stead. The taste
Of bitter grief he had brought on them
Found such reward as best became.
He gave the cattle, farm and the field,
With the cattle whereby they were till'd,
With servants eke, to the honest twain;
So that no fears plagued them again
Lest any other lord should come
At length and turn them from their home.
Also his thankful favour stay'd
Evermore with the pious maid:
Many a day with her he spent,
And gave her many an ornament.

Because of what is said in my rhyme
And the love he bore her from old time.

Thus, it may be, a year went on:
Then all his kinsfolk urged him sore.
Some worthy woman for to woo
And bring her as his wife thereto.
And he answered, "Truly, as I live,
This is good counsel that ye give!"

So he summoned every lord his friend,
That so to this matter they might lend
Such help as honest friends can bring.
And they all came at his summoning,
Everywhence both far and near;
And like his whole vassalage was there,—
Not a single man but was come:
It made, good sooth, a mighty sum.
And the Earl stepped forward in their sight,
Saying: "Sirs, my mind is fixed aright
To wed even as your wills decide:
Take counsel then, and choose me a bride."
So they got together and began;

But there was a mind for every man
Both ways they wrangled, aye and no,
As counsellors are sure to do.

Then again he spake to them and cried:
"Dear friends, now let alone the bride,
And rede me a thing. All ye knew,
Doubtless, that I, a while ago,
With a most loathsome ill was crop'd
And appeared to be altogether lost,
So that all people avoided me
With cursings and cruel modesty.
And yet no man discerneth me now,
Nor woman neither; seeing how
God's mercy hath made me whole again.
Then tell me, I pray of ye full fain,
What I may do to His honouring
Who to mine and hath done this thing."

And they all answered immediately:
"By word and deed it behoveth thee
To offer thyself to the Most High,
And work for Him good works thereby,

That the life He spared may be made His."

"Then," quoth the Earl, "hearken me this.
The damozel who standeth here, —
And whom I embrace, being most dear, —
She it is unto whom I owe
The grace it hath pleased God to bestow.
He saw the simple-spirited
Earnestness of the holy maid,
And even in guerdon of her truth
Gave back to me the joys of my youth
Which seemed to be lost beyond all doubt.
And therefor I have chosen her out
To wed with me, knowing her free.
I think that God will let this be.
But now if I fail, and not obtain,
I will never embrace woman again
For all I am and all I have
Is but a gift, Sirs, that she gave.
Lo! I enjoin ye, with God's will,
That this my longing ye fulfil:
I pray ye all, have but one voice,
And let your choice go with my choice."

Then the cries ceased and the counter-cries
And all the battle of advice;
And every lord, being content
With Henry's choice, granted assent.

Then the priests came, to bind as one
Two lives in bridal unison.
Into his hand they folded hers,
Not to be loosed in coming years,
And uttered between man and wife
God's blessing on the road of their life.

Many a bright and pleasant day
The twain pursued their steadfast way,
Till, hand in hand, at length they trod
Upward to the Kingdom of God.
Even as it was with them, even thus,
And quickly, it must be with us.
To such reward as theirs was then,
God help us in His hour. Amen.